



Guiding Document Consideration of Assistive Technology Needs

Consideration of the need for AT devices and services is an integral part of the educational process contained in IDEA for referral, evaluation, and IEP development. Although AT is considered at all stages of the process, the Consideration Quality Indicators are specific to the consideration of AT in the development of the IEP as mandated by IDEA. In most instances, the Quality Indicators are also appropriate for the consideration of AT for students who qualify for services under other legislation (e.g., 504, ADA).

1. Assistive technology devices and services are considered for every student with disabilities regardless of type or severity of disability.

Intent: Consideration of assistive technology need is required by IDEA and is based on the unique educational needs of the student. Students are not excluded from consideration of AT for any reason. (e.g., type of disability, age, administrative concerns, etc.)

As a part of team deliberation of the special factors in IDEA, it is the responsibility of every IEP team to consider the student's need for assistive technology (AT). Each team's decision about a student's need for AT in educational settings is based on the student's abilities and the tasks they need to accomplish across environments. The need for assistive technology is not dependent on type or level of disability. As IEP teams develop goals, objectives and benchmarks for students, AT can be explored as a potential support for all areas addressed in the IEP.

Example:

Charmaine is a fourth grade student with a specific learning disability in reading. On previous IEPs, AT was not recommended because the school district procedures did not include consideration of the need for AT for students with mild disabilities. There had been no training for IEP team members about AT, and they did not know there were AT tools that could help students like Charmaine. After attending a regional training focusing on AT, the team learned about supported reading technology and wondered if it might be of benefit to Charmaine. While talking to other teams about AT regulations, the team realized that the district practice did not comply with the law. They met with their special education director following the training and began to plan how to bring their district procedures into compliance. In the meantime, the team arranged trials with supported reading technology for Charmaine.

Key Questions

- How does the district assure that all IEP teams appropriately consider AT for all students?
- What training is provided for IEP team members to ensure they are aware of appropriate AT?
- What processes, including forms or other documentation, are used to guide IEP team members through an effective consideration process?

2. During the development of the individualized educational program, the IEP team consistently uses a collaborative decision-making process that supports systematic consideration of each student's possible need for assistive technology devices and services.

Intent: A collaborative process that ensures that all IEP teams effectively consider the assistive technology of students is defined, communicated, and consistently used throughout the agency. Processes may vary from agency to agency to most effectively address student needs under local conditions.

The collaborative decision making process used by IEP teams during consideration is defined at the district level and used consistently by teams during every IEP meeting. Steps and criteria for the process are defined. The information that the team should review and gather in order to make decisions is identified. The agency also defines the steps that the team will take if more information is needed (e.g., observation, referral for further assessment, gathering information about strategies and tools).

Collaboration among team members is essential to ensure that the student's needs are thoroughly analyzed and decisions are not based on one subject or one situation. All team members, including the student, provide information and have input into the decision-making process.

Example:

Teresa is a middle school student with mild cerebral palsy that impacts her organization skills and her ability to produce legible written work. She has had extensive occupational therapy and recently the occupational therapist raised the question about using AT to help Teresa cope successfully with the increased academic demands of middle school. The team had not had much experience with AT, but they were used to working together to problem solve. They used a decision making process that focused on the student and helped them collaboratively identify the problem and potential solutions.

They met briefly after the AT question was raised and decided that they needed to identify the specific tasks that were difficult for Teresa and also to learn more about AT that could be helpful with those tasks. They all agreed to collect data about Teresa's written work and organizational strategies for two weeks. At the same time a person was assigned to investigate AT tools in preparation for the IEP meeting that was scheduled at the end of the month. They came to the IEP meeting with a list of specific tasks that seemed to be most difficult for Teresa, including keeping track of assignments, taking notes in the two classes where the teachers lecture, and completing written assignments that were legible and readable. During the IEP meeting they explained AT to Teresa and her mother. The team agreed that trials were needed with several of the identified tools to help determine if they made a difference in Teresa's independence and legibility of written work. They identified the need for AT in the IEP and planned for the trials.

Key Questions

- How does the district define the collaborative process for AT consideration?
- How does the district ensure that the appropriate team members are involved in the collaborative process?
- Does the process ensure that everyone has input?

3. IEP team members have the collective knowledge and skills needed to make informed assistive technology decisions and seek assistance when needed.

Intent: IEP team members combine their knowledge and skills to determine if assistive technology devices and services are needed to remove barriers to student performance. When the assistive technology needs are beyond the knowledge and scope of the IEP team, additional resources and support are sought.

No one person on the team knows everything that is needed to make informed AT decisions. The most effective teams work collaboratively to identify their own strengths and deficits. The parent and student know about the student's interests, strengths, weaknesses and long range goals. They will also know about strategies used successfully outside the school setting. The teacher(s) who work with the student on a daily basis know about the student's performance and preferences at school. They are also aware of the specific tasks for which supports may be needed, the times in the day that lend themselves to implementing AT use, the steps in the curriculum that lie ahead and many other details that are critical to sound decision making. If team members are unsure about the AT tools to consider, additional support is sought from someone who has the needed knowledge and skills. It is critical to have information about the range of tools, tools the district already has, tools which might need to be acquired, training that may be needed, and how the tools may integrate with the school network. Administrative support may be needed to bring in additional resources.

Example:

Mary is a 9th grader who is reading at the 5th grade level. Due to her reading level, Mary is not making adequate progress in her content area classes, all of which require extensive reading and application of information. Mary and her teacher agree that when Mary does not have to decode every word, she can successfully recall and apply the information. Mary's parents have also noticed this and frequently help Mary with her homework by reading complex material aloud to her. Recently Mary's mother saw an ad for a commercial e-reader and wondered if it could help Mary become a more successful and independent reader. As a first step to exploring this possibility, the team discussed features Mary needed and text-to-speech was at that top of their list. One team member had used this type of device personally and described its features and limitations to Mary and the rest of the team. All were disappointed that text-to-speech was not an option on this e-reader but they knew there were other options. Another team member mentioned that he had also heard that not all content could be read aloud even when the device had that capability. The team thought that an e-reader with accessible content could be really useful to Mary but they realized that they did not enough information about supported reading technology and accessible content to make a decision. So they requested an AT consultation to learn more about e-readers and an appointment with the curriculum director to learn more about accessible content.

Key Questions

- How does the team gain input from all team members, including the parent and student?
- How does the IEP team get assistance related to AT when needed?
- What resources do IEP team members use to increase their knowledge of AT when additional information is needed?
- If the team needs additional information, who could be contacted either inside or outside of the school system to provide needed skills and knowledge?

4. Decisions regarding the need for assistive technology devices and services are based on the student's IEP goals and objectives, access to curricular and extracurricular activities, and progress in the general education curriculum.

Intent: As the IEP team determines the tasks the student needs to complete and develops the goals and objectives, the team considers whether assistive technology is required to accomplish those tasks.

After establishing the present levels of academic achievement and functional performance and developing the student's goals, and objectives if appropriate, the team discusses and identifies tasks that may be difficult and considers whether AT devices might be needed. IEP teams consider a range of factors including academic, non-academic, social and personal issues as they develop the IEP. While a student's academic progress in the curriculum is the starting point, other communication and social needs are also discussed across environments (e.g., the lunch room, the playground, physical education classes, or sports).

Example:

Audrey has a hearing loss and uses American Sign Language (ASL) as her primary means of communication. She has severe motor involvement which impacts her fine motor ability. Her signs are approximations and are not easily understood by an unfamiliar communication partner. It was agreed that Audrey was able to communicate within her classroom at this time. As the discussion continued, Audrey's mom expressed concerns about her ability to communicate outside of the classroom with unfamiliar communication partners. Audrey's mom asked about ways that Audrey could communicate more effectively with her Girl Scout troop and during other afterschool activities. Discussion led to a decision to seek more information about communication needs in outside environments, potential strategies and AT tools that might help Audrey in the wider school environment and in other settings. They agreed to meet again in two weeks to discuss the information gathered.

Key Questions

- In what ways could the AT support the achievement of identified IEP goals?
- For what specific tasks might AT be needed?
- How are the student's curricular and extracurricular needs identified?

5. The IEP team gathers and analyzes data about the student, customary environments, educational goals, and tasks when considering a student's need for assistive technology devices and services.

Intent: The IEP team shares and discusses information about the student's present levels of achievement in relationship to the environments, and tasks to determine if the student requires assistive technology devices and services to participate actively, work on expected tasks, and make progress toward mastery of educational goals.

Data related to primary area(s) of concern are gathered. Considerations in the environment might include classroom arrangement, available tools and supports, access to power when needed, lighting, noise level, etc.

Analysis and discussion of the data provide the team with the information to identify barriers for the student and the tasks that are most difficult. This is the basis to determine whether AT devices and services are needed to support the student in achieving IEP goals.

Example:

Chaz is a 5th grader with difficulty in the area of reading as evidenced by low comprehension scores. The IEP team looked at previous intervention strategies, which included the use of a portable electronic dictionary to help in identifying unfamiliar words, and the effectiveness of those interventions. Performance data showed that when Chaz used his dictionary, he was slower completing reading assignments and his comprehension did not increase. After further analyzing the data, the IEP team determined that Chaz had trouble retaining information, making connections with background knowledge, and answering comprehension questions. The team realized that, although Chaz was using AT, it was not adequate for his current needs. Additional tools or strategies are needed.

Key Questions
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• What relevant and appropriate student data is needed?• How does the IEP team assure that appropriate data is gathered?• How will the team analyze the data that has been gathered?• How does the team use data to determine next steps?

6. When assistive technology is needed, the IEP team explores a range of assistive technology devices, services, and other supports that address identified needs.

Intent: The IEP team considers various supports and services that address the educational needs of the student and may include no tech, low tech, mid-tech and/or high tech solutions and devices. IEP team members do not limit their thinking to only those devices and services currently available within the district.

Following the analysis of the data and identifying the needs and abilities of the student, the team generates a prioritized list of features that the student will need. Features are aspects of a device that help a student overcome barriers caused by their disability or components of a product that make it particularly suited to a student's needs. Examples might be portability, device size, sound production, contrast, re-sizing, text to speech, a range of digital voices with changeable speed, or pitch, etc. The team can identify devices with those features. This is called a feature match. Due to the student's multiple learning environments, the team may need to consider more than one tool in the AT system.

The team reviews a range of devices that have the prioritized features. In some instances, a new device may need to be obtained for the student. In other instances, technologies with those features may be currently available within a student's environment. If the team is not aware of a range of devices, the team seeks assistance from someone with expertise in AT.

The team must also consider which services will be needed to support the use of the identified tools. This can include coordination, training for staff, student and families, and other services identified in IDEA.

Example:

Pablo, a 7th grader, has a mild congenital deformity of his right hand. Although he has received occupational services for many years, he continues to struggle with written assignments. He tires quickly so he tends to write shorter, less complicated responses on tests, essays and homework. His teachers report that his oral presentations are more comprehensive and complex than his written reports.

After exploring a range of AT, the IEP team considered a system that included a special pencil grip for short answers, as well as an audio recorder that can be used as an alternative for note taking and lengthier assignments. They will implement those two things immediately. The team also determined that he needed a trial with a portable word processor or netbook. Both devices are available in their school and a trial with both was written into the IEP. They discussed that he may also be a candidate for voice recognition software for some writing assignments. Since the members of the IEP team are not familiar with voice recognition technology, they will request support from a person in the district who does have this experience to assist them.

Key Questions

- What devices have the identified features needed by this student?
- What devices have already been considered?
- What devices other than those readily available in your school have been considered?
- What other devices should be considered to ensure the whole range has been explored?
- What services and supports need to be considered?
- If supports and services are needed, who within or outside of the school system can be a resource?

7. The assistive technology consideration process and results are documented in the IEP and include a rationale for the decision and supporting evidence.

Intent: Even though IEP documentation may include a checkbox verifying that assistive technology has been considered, the reasons for the decisions and recommendations should be clearly stated. Supporting evidence may include the results of assistive technology assessments, data from device trials, differences in achievement with and without assistive technology, student preferences for competing devices, and teacher observations, among others.

While a simple “yes” or “no” answer verifying consideration of AT on the IEP document may indicate that AT was considered, it does not document the rationale or process in a way that is helpful to the individuals who are implementing the IEP. Clearly explaining what tasks were identified as most difficult and what AT devices were considered is valuable for both immediate implementation and for future IEP teams who will be looking for as much information as possible to help them in their decision making. Many districts use a specific form to help guide the discussion of the need for AT and that form is then attached to the IEP to serve as documentation. In other districts a simple paragraph may be written to explain the data and the discussion that led to the decision that was made about the need for AT. Some states include notes pages in the IEP form which provide a logical place to document the important facts. When there is no notes page, an additional sheet of paper can often be attached to the IEP. The goal is that documentation clearly describes the team consideration process and decisions.

Example:

As he entered kindergarten, Juan’s team was concerned about his extensive communication, language, and learning needs. They identified several areas in which they thought AT devices might help him make progress in the curriculum. Because Juan has been identified as being on the autism spectrum, the team knew it was important to have a visual schedule for him. They used the district’s one page form to guide their AT decision making. It documented their discussions and the specific AT they felt would be needed. The notes identified the symbol system and included examples of symbols that had been most effective. The voice output device that was appropriate for the symbol system and the settings and activities in which Juan had used it successfully were also described.

Key Questions
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• How is the AT consideration process documented in the IEP?• What guidance does the district provide to ensure that consideration has been documented?• What guidance is provided to ensure that the documentation includes the reasons for the decisions and that recommendations are clearly stated?